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ESSAY

Slithy
Toves
Of C.I.A.

By William Safire

*'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.*

Lewis Carroll

An empty sloop named "Brillig," under full sail, was washed up on the shore of Chesapeake Bay four months ago. Coast guardsmen found documents aboard analyzing Soviet military strength, along with boxes of sophisticated electronic gear.

The boat belonged to John Arthur Paisley, a Soviet analyst for the C.I.A. A week later, a waterlogged body was found with a bullet in the back of the head; the corpse was hastily identified as Paisley's, and cremated.

Stansfield Turner, the former Naval person now running the C.I.A., put out word that Paisley possessed no secrets and his death was a simple suicide: "I'm standing on the fine statement by the Maryland State Police," he said, "that they see no evidence of foul play here."

But Paisley was a man in the middle of the great question that divides the U.S. intelligence community: Is there now a "mole" — a Soviet penetrator — high in the C.I.A., who was responsible for last year's incredible leakage of our satellite secrets?

The background: Soon after the assassination of President Kennedy, a K.G.B. officer named Yuri Nosenko defected to the West and assured the C.I.A. that Lee Harvey Oswald had not been trained as an assassin during his stay in the U.S.S.R. But the C.I.A.'s counterintelligence chief, James Angleton, believed Nosenko to be a "plant"; with the tacit approval of Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach, Nosenko was confined and interrogated for years. Unconvinced of the defector's bona fides, the old guard at the C.I.A. finally gave him a new identity and let him go.

Came the mid-70's revolution at the C.I.A., a group of not-so-Young Turks took over, led by William Colby, determined to salvage the agency by vilifying its old guard and making them scapegoats for "dirty tricks." The Helms-Angleton types were labeled "paranoid" — and part of the besmirching of their reputations was the charge that Nosenko had been harassed cruelly rather than welcomed.

The old guard lashed back: In "Legend," by Edward J. Epstein, the case was made that Nosenko was part of a K.G.B. coverup for assassin Oswald. The old guard man who interrogated Nosenko refuted the highly publicized charges made recently by a representative of Director Turner, but his testimony was suppressed by the House Assassinations Committee.

As the battle raged, with media champions being fed by both sides, Mr. Turner brought defector Nosenko into the bosom of the C.I.A. and made him a top analyst. There, the defector was befriended by John Arthur Paisley, who was originally recruited by hard-liner Angleton; now Paisley is dead.

The Senate Intelligence Committee wants to know whether Paisley was the mole, or whether Paisley learned who the mole was — and was killed before he could pass it on. Senators are furious at Mr. Turner's attempt to minimize Paisley's agency significance. An intelligence boss may have to issue a false cover story publicly, but it is against the law for him to mislead an oversight committee in secret session. (Tad Szulc, in the New York Times Magazine, revealed that Paisley was the man who drafted the controversial "Team B" report warning of Soviet buildups and expansionism.)

This schism in the world of U.S. intelligence — where only the hardliners have been getting fired, indicted or rubbed out — is no mere settling of intramural scores. Either view may be mistaken, but if it turns out that the old-line doubters are right — and not the "paranoids" they are depicted as being — then our national security has been seriously weakened.

"The concrete suspicions of Nosenko have never been resolved," says Tennant Bagley, former deputy chief of the C.I.A.'s Soviet bloc division. "It is irresponsible to expose clandestine personnel to this individual." The current top brass are taking unnecessary chances to demonstrate contempt for their predecessors.

Since the possibly murdered Mr. Paisley appreciated the Wonderland wordplay of Lewis Carroll, let us go looking through a glass, darkly:

*Beware the Family Jewels, my son
The looks that spring, the tips from
Smersh —
Taste not Nosenko's Plant, and shun
The myriad Seymourhersh!**Goitzer to the Bagley man
Go find who serves another skipper;
Promotion lies with those who can
Win one for the Double Dipper.**But high in Langley's ranks he stands,
The Jabbermoie, untouched is he —
Kampiles' heel, a friend of Stan's,
He snuggles in his glee.**'Boord Brillig did the bearish spies
Snatch Paisley's prints before he blabbed;
All flimsy were the alibis
While the mole laughs, ungrabbed.*

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